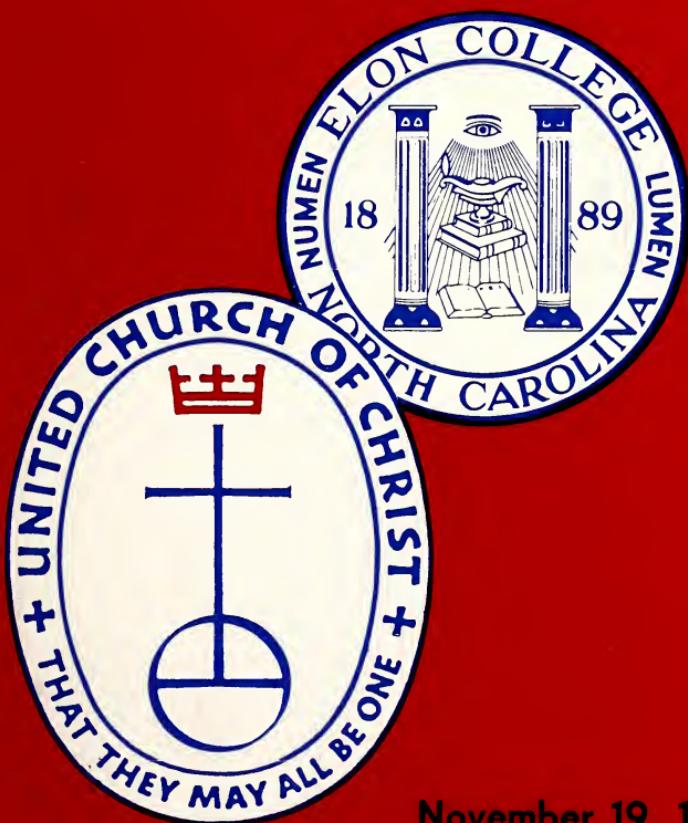


# Conference on Church History



November 19, 1974  
Elon College



# **CONFERENCE ON**

# **CHURCH HISTORY**

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Held on the campus of  
**ELON COLLEGE**

November 19, 1974

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Sponsored By

**CHURCH LIFE AND LEADERSHIP COMMISSION**  
of the Southern Conference  
of the United Church of Christ  
and  
**ELON COLLEGE**



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## **FOREWORD**

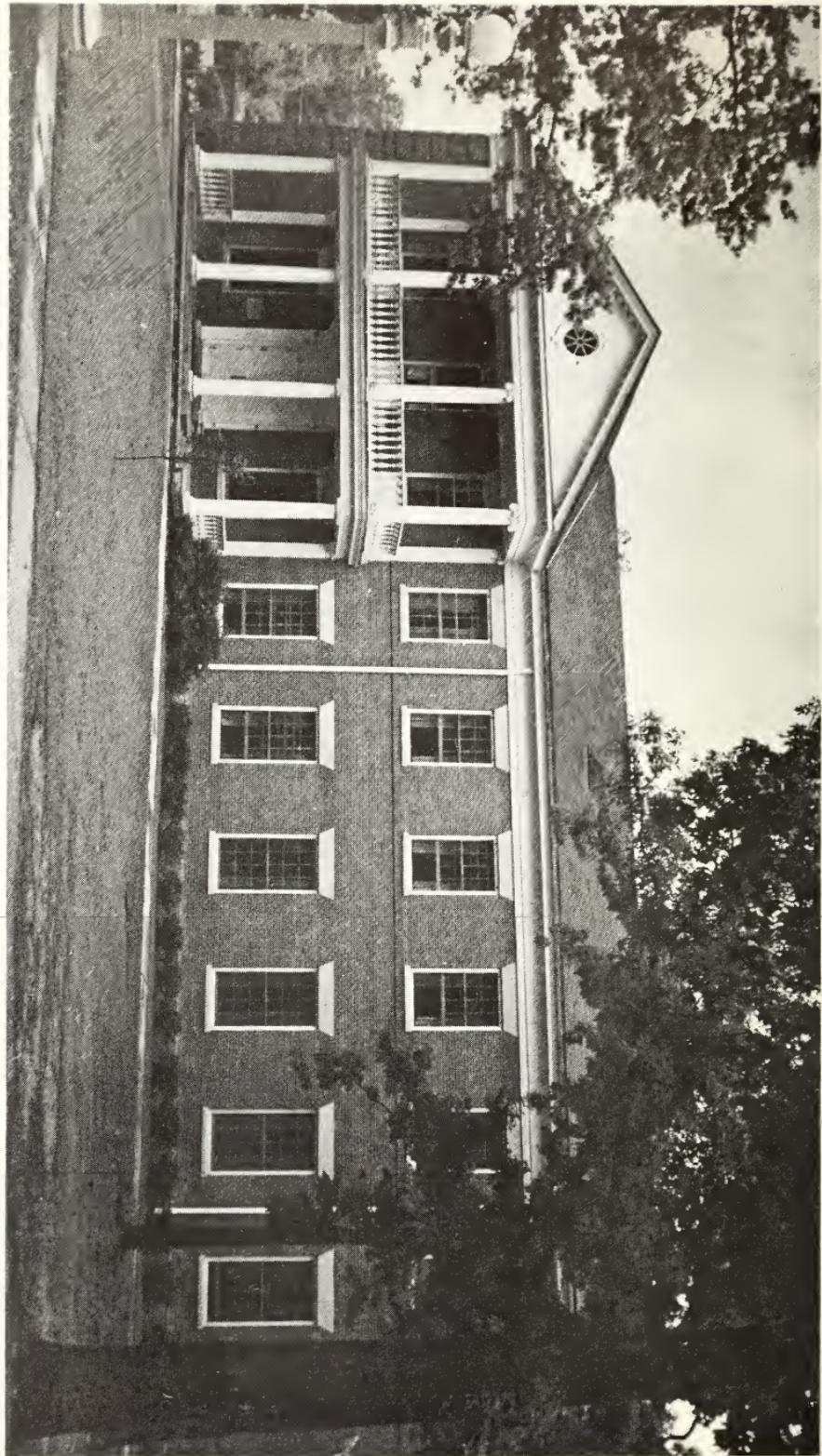
In cooperation with the Lay Life and Leadership Commission of the Southern Conference, Elon College sponsored a Conference on Church History on November 19, 1974, which was attended by a large number of United Church clergy and laity from Virginia and North Carolina. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the various historical traditions which are represented in the Southern Conference of the United Church. Presentations were made by speakers who gave accounts of the historical roots of the several church bodies included in the Conference, followed by a summary on the historical progress of the Conference since its inception in 1957.

A presentation on the history of the Congregational churches was made by Dr. Alfred T. Hurst, retired campus minister at Elon College. An account of the development of the Christian churches was presented by Dr. Durward T. Stokes, professor of history at Elon and co-author with the late Dr. William T. Scott of "A History of the Christian Church in the South." Dr. J. Taylor Stanley, former superintendent of the Convention of the South, described the development of the black Congregational-Christian Churches. The Rev. Thomas Hamilton, pastor of the Elon College Community Church, spoke on the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Rev. Frank W. Snider, Sr., pastor of Calvary Church, Thomasville, N. C., explained the historical development of the Reformed Church in the United States. Conference Minister Dr. James H. Lightbourne, Jr., recounted the story of the merger of the Congregational-Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ. He also traced the progress of the Southern Conference since its beginning in 1957.

Conference sessions were held on the Elon campus and were presided over by Dr. Robert C. Baxter, vice president for legal affairs of the College, and Dr. Robert W. Delp, professor of history at Elon. Guests at the Conference were welcomed at the noon luncheon by Dr. J. Fred Young, president of the College.

Because of many requests, Elon College is making available the essential portions of the several papers delivered. We trust that members and friends of Southern Conference will find the following pages stimulating, enlightening, and a witness to the rich traditions that have distinguished the United Church of Christ.

Robert C. Baxter  
Robert W. Delp  
Conference Coordinators



Elon College's McEwen Dining Hall — Site of the Conference

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword - - - - -	3
The Congregational Churches to 1931 - - - - -	7
The Christian Churches to 1931 - - - - -	13
Black Congregational Christian Churches in the South to 1957 - - - - -	17
The Evangelical Synod of North America to 1934 - - -	24
The Reformed Church in the United States to 1934 and the Evangelical and Reformed Church to 1957 - -	30
The Congregational Christian Churches 1931-1957 and the United Church of Christ since 1957 - - -	35



# HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES TO 1931

By

Dr. Alfred T. Hurst

When one thinks of Congregationalism one naturally thinks of the Pilgrim and Puritan heritage of America because it is in no small part the basis of our democratic culture. Nobody knows where or when the name "Congregational" began. Perhaps, like Topsy, it "just growed." Or it may have been formulated to distinguish it from Presbyterianism. This is only a guess.

Probably the oldest extant account of the meeting of Congregationalists is the report of a gathering of "the divers of the towne" on a Sunday "about XII of the clocke" in the year 1550-1551. They "fell in argument of things of the Scripture," and through the method of democratic discussion came to some fundamental conclusions. The chief characteristic of the gathering was the spirit of freedom. They were free to open their hearts to each other, free from repressive ecclesiastical authorities, and free from anything which might have hindered their access to God's truth. They gave corporate witness that God desired his people to be free. But their witness to freedom was borne in a day when it was costly, for some even the cost of life itself.

The translation of the Bible into the vernacular, and the slow dissemination of biblical knowledge led some independent minds to read and think for themselves. They became convinced that the teachings of the Gospels were markedly different from the confusing dogmas of later ages. The Bible, as they understood it, became the charter of their faith. A characteristic note of their faith was the surpassing importance of truth, the free direct access of every living soul to God, and a religious devotion based not upon holy places and ritual, but upon loyalty to God's will. They held that the church is a body of Christ's people whom God has called out of the world and gathered together for worship, fellowship, and service. When even two or three gathered in Christ's name, He was present with them to lead and guide.

The early Pilgrims were Separatists who argued there should be reformation of the Church "without tarrying for anie," that the Church should be freed from all Romish corruptions. For a long period the Pilgrims hesitated to break away from the prestige and noble history of the established church. The love of union and fellowship was deep within, but they felt it must be union with diversity. And they argued that the Church should be free of all outside control, either civil or ecclesiastical. They were certain the established Church was drifting farther and farther from its Scriptural moorings.

These Separatists bore their testimony for truth and asserted their freedom in an age when "the powers that be" cared little for truth and did their best to crush freedom. The views this little group held were heretical and laid them open to fine and imprisonment, but they were prepared to suffer and endure at all costs for their faith. The laws of England at the time provided for imprisonment without bail for those who refused to attend church services, or were present at any unlawful assemblies, with the further penalties that, if the offender didn't conform within three months, he must leave the realm. If he refused to do this he was to be deemed a felon, and the penalty was death without benefit of clergy. Soon the civil and ecclesiastical authorities determined to restore these men to the churches or harrify them out of the land.

There was no safety for the Separatists save in recantation or in flight. They would not recant and were forced into exile. After many attempts and great hardships, separations, and persecutions, they were united again in Holland with John Robinson as their leader and William Brewster as elder. On the 12th of February, 1609, they obtained permission to settle at Leyden, an academic center where the problems of learning, philosophy, theology, and biblical exegesis were discussed with absolute freedom.

The Pilgrims remained in Holland twelve years. Ultimately they determined to seek a new home across the stormy Atlantic. The account of their tempestuous voyage of two months on the Mayflower, and their arrival at Cape Cod, is familiar to all. When the voyage ended, it became evident that some practical means must be devised to maintain law and order. To accomplish this they met in the cabin of the Mayflower on November 11, 1620, and bound themselves together by that famous document known later as the Mayflower Compact. At the time, in no part of the world did there exist a government of just and equal laws. The elementary principles which the Compact proclaimed foreshadowed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

The Congregational churches, from then until now, have been united by a simple covenant of faith. As saved men they bound themselves freely in a covenant to walk together in all God's ways made known or to be made known to them. They sought to return to the original purity of primitive Christianity as found in the New Testament. They recognized the sufficiency of Scripture, the validity of reason and conscience under divine control, the spiritual authority of Jesus Christ, and the necessity of living pure and upright lives.

The Pilgrims and Puritans were not identical movements. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans, who followed the Pilgrims to

the new world in 1628, embraced a concept different from the Pilgrims. They didn't consider themselves separatists from the Church of England. But, when they organized their church in Salem, they installed their ministers without benefit of bishops with the aid of Deacon Samuel Fuller, Governor Bradford, and William Brewster from Plymouth. Their influence led the Salem Church to banish the Prayer Book. Two members who objected to this were promptly returned to England as "schismatics." At first the Puritans wished only to purify the established church, but by the end of the century a generation was trained to local independence and the autonomy of the local congregation. As a result the Puritans copied the procedures of the Pilgrims in every essential. Both Pilgrims and Puritans were confident that more light and truth would yet come to them to clarify the gospel of Christ.

The early Congregationalists insisted on simplicity of organization, self-government of the local congregation, and full participation of the laity in Christian service and church government. The local congregation was basic. They spent relatively less of their force upon the operation of denominational machinery than, for example, the Presbyterians. They had less to operate and so there was little oiling of machinery. Plymouth independency outlasted all attempts to make the "Way" Presbyterian. By sporadic and uncoordinated efforts they spanned the continent. Their lack of system was due primarily to the lack of a central directing authority. That so much was accomplished with so little overhead direction is a tribute to the Congregational way.

Congregationalists were always suspicious of any overhead organization. It took a long time for the churches to banish suspicion of any authority outside themselves. It was not until 1871 that an active National Council came into being, and twenty years later that the International Congregational Council was formed primarily as an instrument of fellowship. Not a single woman was present, but the program committee was instructed to provide for the representation of women at future Councils. Women were present in 1899 and three of them addressed the Council. The International Council met at five to ten year intervals. The National Council adopted a Constitution, but didn't hesitate to ignore it frequently in a happy-go-lucky way.

Puritans and Pilgrims stood for democracy, and the Congregational form of church organization was far more democratic than either Presbyterian or Episcopalian, but with early Puritans democracy didn't operate at full capacity. They believed in it, and yet were afraid of it.

A move toward the forming of associations in fairly limited areas was made to protect the churches from impostors to whom

some churches turned because they felt better trained ministers were too expensive. Gradually such associations validated the ministerial standing of their members. At first some protested that these associations savored too much of Presbyterianism, but this was resolved by the provision that the association could only advise, resolve, and suggest. Its power was moral, not legal, but most active churches did what they were asked to do. In time congregationalism developed considerable centralization in state conferences and nation-wide meetings with delegates. The association could exercise no authority over churches or persons, but examination of candidates for introduction to the churches was a wise safeguard.

As for Councils, it was assumed that the power of a Council was to declare truth, not to exercise authority or jurisdiction. When the Council had done all, the churches were still free to accept or refuse the advice given. Councils had neither legislative nor executive authority over the churches.

Throughout its history, Congregationalism experienced the tension between freedom and fellowship and struggled to keep them in balance. The problem was analogous to that of rowing a boat. To pull too strongly on the oar of freedom veered toward anarchy, and to apply too much muscle to the oar of fellowship threatened dictation. The ideal was to give equal attention to both fellowship and freedom.

Congregationalism was never numerically strong in the South, and because of the fewness of their numbers was largely lost in the main stream of church life in this region. During the reign of Charles II some Puritans were driven from Virginia by Governor Berkeley, and some of them took refuge in North Carolina. In the last years of the seventeenth century, eight families from the Massachusetts Colony with their families left for South Carolina. The Old Circular Congregational Church in Charleston was organized in 1681. Most of the families pushed on up the river from Charleston and established a prosperous colony. Fifty-seven years later the larger part of the colony moved on into Georgia and founded a settlement called Midway which had an amazing record. It was the first to establish a school of importance in Georgia, Sunbury Academy, in 1788. Among the trustees was the Rev. Abiel Holmes, father of Oliver Wendell Holmes. The Rev. Mr. Holmes was pastor of the Midway Church before going to Cambridge, Mass. Midway no longer functions as an organized church, although it is maintained as a historic shrine. Midway provided two signers of the Declaration of Independence, Lyman Hall and Button Gwinnett; four governors of the state of Georgia; six Congressmen; and two Senators. From this community came two university chancellors, six college professors, three theological seminary professors, three college presidents, five authors and one

historian, besides a host of teachers who taught all through the South. The LeConte brothers, eminent geologists, were from this community. Beyond this, the parish had a phenomenal religious record. The Midway Church was the first to lead in temperance reform in Georgia, and it led many other movements that made for civic righteousness in community and state. They were also pioneers in Negro evangelization through education. Eighty-three men went out from this church either as pastors or as missionaries. The first minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the Imperial Court of China, the Hon. John E. Ward, was from this parish. It is said that when he was to be ushered into the presence of the emperor he was instructed to bow to the floor until the emperor bade him rise. Ward replied that he had been taught at home never to bow to anyone but God and women and he could not change. He left the imperial city and did not meet the emperor. This was the will and spirit of the people among whom he was trained. The Midway Church perished, but not its influence which has been multiplied over and over throughout the South.

Early in the 18th Century a group of English dissenters left for America, most of whom were well educated. By way of Philadelphia, these brave spirits pushed into Western Pennsylvania and then turned south through Maryland and the Tidewater districts of Virginia, then on into North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee. The Battle of King's Mountain, said to be the most decisive battle of the Revolution since it was the turning-point of that great struggle, was fought entirely by Puritans and Scottish Highlanders. They were devoted to the cause of liberty and popular government. They were also a people of religious zeal and faith, with a deep concern for education. It is this rich heritage that early Congregationalists left to the South.

Early in the twentieth century there was a growing feeling that the time had come to formulate a statement of what Congregationalists unitedly believed. Too many had the impression Congregationalism consisted of believing in nothing in particular. The National Council, meeting in Kansas City in 1913, marked a high point in the history of the denomination. It approved a report in three sections, all rather brief, relating to Faith, Polity, and the Wider Relationships. It reaffirmed the freedom and responsibility of the individual soul, the right of private judgment, the autonomy of the local church and its independence of all ecclesiastical control. In matters of common concern they approved cooperation and fellowship in district, state, and national bodies. They also affirmed a willingness to unite with all branches of Christ's Church in hearty cooperation that the Lord's prayer for oneness might be answered. The Statement of Faith approved by the Council was widely used in services of worship of Con-

gregational Churches. This evident ecumenical concern of Congregationalism resulted in the merger with the Christian Churches in 1931 and later with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ.



Dr. Alfred W. Hurst

Retired Campus Minister and  
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Elon College; Minister of  
Congregational Churches.

# HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TO 1931

By

Dr. Durward T. Stokes

John and Charles Wesley organized the Methodist Societies in England as a reform movement within the Anglican Church. Methodism spread to the American colonies shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution and was promoted by traveling preachers under the direction of several supervisors appointed by John Wesley for that purpose. The itinerants were authorized to preach but only ordained priests of the Church of England were allowed to administer the sacraments to their converts. When the War began, most of the Anglican clergy and all of the Methodist officials except Francis Asbury returned to England. This left the traveling evangelists in the embarrassing position of having no means of comforting their followers with baptism or a celebration of Holy Communion.

In 1775, James O'Kelly had joined the Methodists and immediately became an enthusiastic missionary in Virginia. Dismayed by the inability to completely minister to his followers, and convinced that the Church of England was gone forever from the United States, he met with his equally unhappy colleagues at a conference in Fluvanna County to find a solution to the dilemma. After prayerful deliberation, the preachers decided they were entitled to independent action, and a committee was elected to act as a presbytery and administer the sacraments to the members of the Methodist societies.

When Francis Asbury learned of this action, he emphatically condemned it as unauthorized and virtually dismissed the Virginia preachers from the the Methodist fellowship. As a result, a proposal was made to submit the problem to Wesley and abide by his decision. This was done, but the aging Founder delayed his reply until after the Americans had won the Revolution. Dismayed by this outcome, which held no promise of a return to the former system, Wesley authorized the Americans to act upon their own initiative for "They are now at liberty to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church." This reply was announced at the famous Methodist Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784 and, after its reading, the American Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke consecrated themselves as its bishops, and ordained the itinerants as ministers. O'Kelly was also made the superintendent of a large district of the church in Virginia.

During the ensuing years, the Methodist membership increased rapidly, but the ministers became convinced that they

were gradually losing their independent rights as the office of the bishop became more and more autocratic. This unhappy situation came to a climax in a conference in Baltimore in 1792. At this meeting, O'Kelly moved that if the bishop assigned a minister to a post which the preacher did not desire to fill, the minister's local conference could place the objecting clergyman in another post. Asbury adamantly refused to agree to this proposal, but the final decision was left to a vote of the conference. After three days of heated discussion, the vote was taken and the power of the bishop upheld. O'Kelly then returned to Virginia and, after several attempts at reconciliation failed, resigned from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1793. A number of his ministerial colleagues took the same course and the statement has been made that more than one thousand Methodist members followed these leaders.

On August 4, 1794, a conference was held in Surry County, Virginia, to organize a new church. The decision was made to call it the Republican Methodist Church to indicate its democratic form of government. However, it was found that people confused the church with the Republican political party and a suggestion was approved that "Christian" be a sufficient name for the church and "the Bible its only creed." The new organization then began to grow and congregations organized in Virginia and the Carolinas, despite the publication of a number of pamphlets by Asbury's followers and "the O'Kellyites" which bitterly denounced each other.

Coincident with the early years of Christian growth, a number of New England Calvinists under the leadership of Abner Jones and Elias Smith, withdrew from Baptist churches and formed a group known simply as "Christian." Hearing of the development of the southern movement, the northerners sent fraternal delegates to investigate the possibility of a union. This plan seemed almost sure of success until the New Englanders, true to their Baptist background, insisted that immersion be the only approved form of baptism for the membership. O'Kelly would not hear to this as he believed in allowing the convert to choose his own method for the sacrament and unity was not achieved. The clash produced an even more regrettable consequence as the southern Christians divided in opinion on the subject. The result was the organization of the Eastern Virginia Conference, favorable to a north-south union, and the North Carolina and Virginia Conference, which adhered to the opinions of O'Kelly.

This unfortunate split retarded the growth of the Christians but did not stifle it, as both conferences sent out missionaries and gradually a sufficient number of congregations were formed to compose a conference in the southern states, in Tennessee and Kentucky. In order to communicate better with the churches over

such a large area, the conferences in North Carolina and those in Virginia united in 1844 to found **The Christian Sun**, and the editors of this church paper dedicated their efforts to promote a greater unity. As a result, in 1854, representatives from the Virginia and the North Carolina organizations gathered at O'Kelly Chapel in Chatham County, North Carolina, to unveil a marker at the grave of James O'Kelly. On this occasion an agreement was reached to plan for a Christian union in the South. The necessity for such an organization was further augmented by the fact that the Eastern Virginia Conference had on two occasions sent William Brock Wellons to meetings of the General Convention of the Christians in the North and West to investigate the possibilities of a national union and both times plans had been disrupted by clashing political interests. Therefore the need was greater than ever before for a united governmental organization of the southern churches. Consequently, in response to this conviction, representatives of the Christian conferences in the South met at Union Christian Church (today known as Union Ridge), in Alamance County, North Carolina, in 1856 and organized the Southern Christian Convention. The following Principles were then adopted as the foundation upon which the church rested:

1. Christ the only head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments our only creed or confession of faith.
4. Christian character or vital piety the true scriptural test of fellowship or church membership.
5. The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all.

At various times during the second half of the nineteenth century, proposals were made to extend these Principles but the Church would never agree to any change. In the ensuing century a sixth Principle was added, which was really a combination of parts of the fourth and fifth provisions, and did not alter the general meaning in any manner.

The optimism generated at Union was soon marred by the interruption of the War For Southern Independence and it was not until after that unfortunate conflict ended that the Christians were able to make notable progress. Then, Elon College was founded in 1889, followed later by the Christian Orphanage, and various home and foreign missionary endeavors were launched. In 1890, fraternal delegates were again dispatched to the annual General Meeting of Christians in the North, and Daniel Albright Long, brother of the first president of Elon College, was elected

president of the body for two successive terms. The Christian Connection was thus renewed but again interrupted by a war in 1917. Therefore, it was not until 1922 that the American Christian Convention met at the First Christian Church in Burlington, North Carolina, and the southern, northern, western, and Canadian Christians united into a national denomination.

Immediately after this happy event, devoted churchmen began to work diligently for further expansion and were rewarded on June 27, 1931, when a merger was consummated which formed the Congregational and Christian Churches in the United States into one denomination. The culmination of this event has been aptly described as follows:

There was no staging of anything spectacular, no outward evidence of the momentous thing that was happening in creating the largest union of churches in history, but the great audience spontaneously burst into the singing of **Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;** and that was the most fitting symbol and expression of thankfulness and hope that could have been devised, had more studied preparation been made.

From this significant occasion, the Church could view with pride the progress made since James O'Kelly and his associates decided in 1794 to call themselves "Christians," and look forward to even a greater part in the work of the Kingdom on earth.



Dr. Durward T. Stokes

Professor of History, Elon College; co-author of **A History of the Christian Church in the South.**

# HISTORY OF BLACK CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN THE SOUTH TO 1957

By

Dr. J. Taylor Stanley

(Formerly, Churches of the Convention of the South of Congregational Christian Churches,  
now included in Seven Conferences of the United Church of Christ.)

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The history of the black Congregational Christian Churches of the South covers a span of 110 years,—from 1865 to 1975. With one exception, there were no black Congregational or Christian churches in the South before the end of the war between the states. The Providence Church of Norfolk, Virginia, (now Chesapeake) was organized by Freedmen in 1852; whether as a Christian Church or not, it was one of the first black churches of Virginia to identify with the Christian Denomination.

Before 1865, many of the white Christian churches provided a balcony where slaves could be brought for the regular worship services. There were a few instances in which young white ministers and white women brought slave children and their elders together in Sunday Schools and gave them instruction in the Bible. Many were taught to read. When the War closed in the spring of 1865, blacks began almost immediately to organize churches of their own, after the Master's denominational pattern. Several of our black churches in Virginia and North Carolina place their origin in 1865. When the ministers and churches met in 1866 to organize their first black conference—The North Carolina Colored Christian Conference—there were 12 ministers and 20 churches that were represented in the meeting. This was the "Mother Conference" and it included all black Christian churches.

The beginnings of these churches were crude. In many instances it simply meant moving from the balcony to a nearby place of worship. The new place could be an abandoned cabin, an old stable, a "Brush Arbor," or an air-conditioned open space under the trees. They had no church buildings. In some instances their first pastors were white Christian ministers. In nearly all instances they were assisted and encouraged by white leaders, who were appointed by The Southern Christian Convention to work with "the colored brethren in organizing their own churches and conferences, in keeping with the Cardinal Principles of the Christian Denomination." These leaders attended all meetings of the black conferences, gave directions and often presided over the business meetings and the ordination and licensure of black ministers. Among these Southern Convention appointees were such illustrious names as W. B. and J. W. Wellons, H. B. Hayes, E. W. Beale and J. N. Manning.

Rev. William M. Hayes was the first Elected President of the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference. Under his leadership, the Conference made commendable progress in the organization of new congregations, erecting modest church buildings and improving ministerial leadership. 1873 was a significant year for black Christian churches. In that year the Conference was held at Christian Chapel near Apex, North Carolina. Rev. A. Apple, Rev. J. W. Wellons, and Rev. W. G. Clements were "Fraternal Messengers" from the Southern Convention. At this meeting an Eastern North Carolina Association of Christian Disciples churces approached the Conference to request recognition as a Conference of the Christian Denomination. It was finally agreed that there should be a Western North Carolina Conference and an Eastern North Carolina Conference, and that the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad should be the dividing line between the two. However, at the 1874 meeting of the Eastern North Carolina Conference there was heated disagreement as to doctrine and principles of government of the church. The Disciples withdrew. Nine churches remained loyal to the "Christian Platform," and later became the Eastern Atlantic Colored Christian Conference. Also, at the 1873 Session of the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference "the Conference voted to assess the membership of the churches for a sufficient amount to put a high school in operation at Franklinton, North Carolina;" and on December 11, 1873, ministers and delegates of black Christian churches of Virginia met at Mt Ararat Church in Nansemond County and formed the Eastern Virginia Colored Christian Conference. Rev. Justin Copeland was elected first President of the Conference.

Thus, within a decade three black conferences had been organized. These conferences reported as follows:

North Carolina Colored Christian Conference—23 ministers,  
35 churches.

Eastern Atlantic Colored Christian Conference—11 ministers,  
9 churches.

Eastern Virginia Colored Christian Conference—7 ministers,  
7 churches.

Or a grand total of 41 ministers and 51 churches. Churches continued to develop around important centers, such as Burlington, Norlina, Raleigh and New Bern in North Carolina, and Suffolk in Virginia. Over 90% of all Black Christian churches in the two states were located within a radius of 30 miles of these centers.

In 1878 a school for blacks was opened in the Christian Church at Franklinton, North Carolina, with Professor Henry E. Long as principal and teacher. In 1880 the school moved to its

first building on its own location just south of town between old Highway No. 1 and the Seaboard Railroad. Rev. George Young, a young white minister from New York, became principal the same year. Mr. Long continued as one of the teachers. Originally, the school was known as the Franklinton Literary and Theological Institute. Later the name was changed, and the school was incorporated in 1891 as Franklinton Christian College.

Prof. Henry E. Long became the first black president of the College in 1904 and served for 13 years. In 1905 the Afro-Christian Conferences bought an 83 acre tract of land one mile north of the town of Franklinton. With very considerable help from the General Convention, the Southern Convention and Northern donors, a block machine was bought and soon a large, imposing, three-story "stone" building, with complete basement, was erected on the new site. A President's house and teachers' cottages were added, and when the Depression arrived a brick building which was to provide spacious kitchen, dining room and classrooms; and a dormitory for girls was under construction. The school operated on this site for 25 years. It was never a college; but its training of teachers for our public schools, and especially its training of ministers and lay-leaders for our Afro-Christian churches was its invaluable contribution to these churches and the communities in which they were located. Members of the College faculty shared generously in Conference meetings and gave leadership to our churches. At the College, conference programs and minutes, Sunday School literature for the churches and an Afro-Christian journal,—"The Missionary Herald and Christian Star,"—were edited and printed. Largely because of the influence of Franklinton Christian College, the Afro-Christian Churches continued to make progress.

In 1892 at Watson's Chapel (now West Street) in New Bern, North Carolina, a National Convention was formed. It met every two years. In 1916 it called itself "Biennial General Convention of the Afro-Christian Church of the United States of America, Canada, South America and the West Indies." In 1916 the Afro-Christian Convention met at Wesley Grove Church in Newport News, Virginia. Rev. Smith A. Howell was President of the Convention and Pastor of the host church. Seven Conferences were represented in this meeting. In addition to the three previously mentioned, there were: The Lincoln Conference; The Georgia and Alabama Conference; The New York; New Jersey and Pennsylvania Conference; and The British Guiana-South American Conference. The minutes of this meeting listed 153 Churches with a total membership of 9,783. There was no listing for Georgia-Alabama; 32 other churches listed no membership.

However, Rev. Oscar F. Gunn, President, and other ministers and delegates of the Conference were present at the meeting. (It

was my privilege, as the Superintendent of the Convention of the South, to meet Rev. Gunn and to welcome him and the Afro-Christian church that remained of the Georgia-Alabama Conference into the Alabama-Mississippi Conference. The church was the Sweet Home Christian Church of Roanoke, Alabama).

In the minutes of the 1916 meeting of the Afro-Christian Convention, there are two statements which stand out significantly. One was made by Rev. Joseph (Joe) Mann—"I have baptized over a thousand souls to the Christian Faith; I have built 19 churches and done what I could. I have had to go 25 and 30 miles to a church; I have had to swim the creek with my clothes on my head; I had little or no pay, but I went just the same." The other statement was made by President Howell in his annual address—"The rapid intellectual advance of the pew is an imperative call for a trained ministry. The future hope of our church depends largely upon the School of Theology at Franklinton Christian College . . . Our plea is for an educated ministry. On this the respectability and the influence of our Church depend." This was indeed prophetic; for the work of Franklinton Christian College made the first quarter of the 20th Century the golden years for our Afro-Christian Church and its ministry, and this influence has not yet been replaced. Largely because of the great depression, Franklinton Christian College closed in 1930, and the main source of trained leadership for our black Christian churches disappeared. This brings us up to the 1931 Merger of the Congregational and Christian Churches.

I will now turn briefly to the black Congregational Churches of the South. These churches also started in 1865, but their beginnings were quite different from those of our Christian churches. The black Christian churches were indigenous. The black Congregational churches were spawned by the American Missionary Association Schools. Commissioned ministers and teachers of the Association were already at work in the South when the guns of war were silenced. They had followed the Union armies along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Virginia to Texas; down the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans and the Gulf coast; and from points on the Mississippi River in Mississippi and Tennessee across the South to Savannah Georgia. Their mission was a mission of mercy. Thousands of Freedmen and run-away slaves had flocked to the Union camps, and became one of their most serious problems. These blacks were hungry, ignorant and destitute. The Army officers welcomed the missionaries as angels of mercy, opened up barracks or confiscated houses to them for their work, and gave them protection where necessary from regional hostility. Schools for blacks were opened and were soon overcrowded with children and often with mothers who came "to learn to read." Night schools were provided for working adults. The educational objective of these schools was

threefold: literary, religious and industrial. In addition to literary and industrial training, every school of the Association taught Bible, required daily attendance at religious chapel services; and all boarding students were required to attend Sunday School and church services. Religion was definitely a required part of the training received in these schools of the American Missionary Association.

Five years after the close of the Civil War, schools had been started in every one of the Confederate States, and colleges had been established in Atlanta, Nashville, Talladega, Tougaloo and New Orleans. (Le Moyne of Memphis, Tenn., and Tillotson of Austin, Texas, followed in 1871 and 1876 respectively.) Four of these black colleges had theological departments in which most of the early black Congregational ministers, and many of other denominations, were trained. At least 75% of the Association teachers were women, and about 90% of the male teachers were ordained Congregational ministers. These ministers were directly responsible for the organization of most early Congregational churches in the South, and they were the first pastors of many of them. They worked in the black conferences and were frequently elected to offices in them. At the same time in the schools and seminaries they were training young black men in theology and pastoral work and encouraging them to go out into surrounding areas and organize Congregational Sunday Schools and churches.

Perhaps we should give special consideration to North Carolina, for North Carolina is the only Southern state in which Black Christian churches and Black Congregational churches co-existed. A Congregational church was organized at nearly every point where there was an American Missionary Association school. The school house or the school chapel was the first place of worship. This was true of churches at Beaufort, Dudley, Wilmington, Raleigh, Strieby, Troy, Candor, Asheboro, Oaks (near Mebane), Whitsett, Sedalia, McLeansville, and Kings Mountain. In many instances these churches continued to use the property after the schools were closed; most of the churches now own the church sites that were once the property of the Association. Many of the Association teachers encouraged students of promise to continue their education in Association colleges and seminaries. Several of these returned to North Carolina and served in our churches and public schools. Included among them were George J. Thomas, M. N. McRae, H. W. Brown, D. J. Flynn, Obadiah Hawkins, Oscar F. Barnhill, George W. Hannar and Charles F. Rush.

Because of these schools and colleges, by the end of the 19th century trained black leaders for our black Congregational churches were coming of age; and they helped to create in North Carolina a climate for church growth and progressive church

development; and to make the first Quarter of the 20th Century the golden age for black Congregational churches in North Carolina.

By 1925 North Carolina State Conference of Congregational Churches was reporting a total of 55 churches and 3,445 members. Over the entire South many changes had taken place and many new churches were organized and grouped into six black Congregational Conferences. In 1915 the administration of black churches and conferences shifted from the National or Regional offices of the American Missionary Association and was placed in the hands of black indigenous leadership. The South was divided into four districts. The churches of each district were grouped into workable geographical areas with a leader for each group. Each District had a Field Superintendent and an Executive, or Planning Committee, usually made up of the group leaders. Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina constituted one of these Districts and Rev. Dallas J. Flynn of Charlotte was the Field Superintendent. By 1925 there were a total of 151 black Congregational churches in the South with a total membership of 9,402.

But also by 1925 recession for our black churches of the South had begun. About 75% of these, regardless of background, were country churches, supported by agriculture. Changing patterns in farm tenancy and cotton production, the coming of the boll weevil and the Mexican beetle, World War I, the mechanization of agriculture, and the heavy migrations from South to North, from rural to urban communities and to the West Coast drained off the population of many of our communities and dried up many of our churches. Most of our black churches, both rural and urban, were seriously affected. The cap-stones were laid by the great depression, the closing of Franklinton Christian College, and the closing of all theological departments in all of our black colleges in the South. The sources of continuing church membership, of trained church leadership, and of essential economic substance had been cut off.

The 1931 Merger of Congregational and Christian churches found our black churches disillusioned and in a state of confusion. But the membership of the churches slowly increased as did

financial support for the local church and mission endeavors. In 1950 The Convention of the South of Congregational Christian Churches was organized. This body included all black Congregational Christian Churches of the South and at the time of the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957 was moving toward becoming an independent, self-supporting Conference.



Dr. J. Taylor Stanley

Former Superintendent of the  
Convention of the South of  
Congregational Christian  
Churches.

# HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL SYNOD OF NORTH AMERICA TO 1934

By

The Rev. Thomas Hamilton

The trumpet blast that awakened Europe to a new religious day was the posting of his 95 theses on the doors of the castle church in Wittenberg, October 31, 1517, by Martin Luther. As the preacher and professor of Wittenberg, Luther is already preaching the gospel of salvation through grace by faith alone.

When the theses are published in 1517, Huldreich Zwingli is already emphasizing the heart of evangelism teaching that sins are forgiven only through the ransom of Christ. Startlingly, over the church doors in Einsiedeln, even as Zwingli preaches, are inscribed the words:

"Here sins are forgiven by the Virgin Mary."

On October 1, 1529, Luther and Zwingli met together in Marburg in an attempt to present a protestant united front against Rome. They debated for two days, and drew up 15 articles of faith. Fourteen of the articles brought mutual agreement. The 15th was on the Lord's Supper. As the story goes: they sat in a dark and dusty room with a table between them. According to one tradition Luther would write with his finger in the dust:

"Das ist mein Korper"

and Zwingli responded:

"Das is nicht mein Korper"

Another tradition says Luther wrote with chalk on a velvet table-cloth in Latin

"Hoc est Corpus Meum"

and Zwingli responded:

"Hoc est Non Corpus Meum"

At any rate, Luther concluded with the unfortunate statement which was to prove true for almost 300 years: "You have a different spirit from ours."

I mention these strands of history, because they are pertinent. Until September 27, 1817, they form the triple outline of German church life. Lutherans, Reformed, and Roman Catholics grew side by side.

King Frederick III of Prussia came to the throne in 1797. He was determined to unite the forces of the Lutheran and Reformed groups. Napoleonic Wars caused a 15-year detour. The Wars

had a secondary effect of turning the people toward God "from whom cometh help." They humbled themselves and he exalted them. Napoleon fell and peace was restored.

Then on September 27, 1817, 300 years after the Reformation began, Frederick issued the famous proclamation uniting the Lutheran and Reformed churches into the Evangelical Church of Germany. The details of the consummation were to be left to the ecclesiastical authorities in the various provinces. No common creed was adopted; differences were not adjusted. It was Frederick's view that they would outlive the differences in view of what both groups cherished in common.

I give you this background as a way of saying that the German immigrants to the United States in the second quarter of the 19th century were neither Lutherans nor Reformed — they came from the Evangelical Church of Germany. In most of these churches, the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism were used and the Heidelberg Catechism was also permitted.

Many of the newcomers landed at the eastern ports of New York and Baltimore and made their way westward by stagecoach and canal boat. Increasing numbers came to New Orleans. Remember the Louisiana Purchase was in 1803. The Great Northwest was opening and the portal was New Orleans. Up the Mississippi they came with German Bibles and beer recipes. Some settled in St. Louis; some followed the river to Milwaukee; some took the Missouri River on westward. Among the pioneers was Pastor Herman Garlichs who came in 1833 and was soon serving a community of German farmers in Femme Osage. Others we shall mention later.

From 1830 to 1845 there was an average annual emigration from Germany of 40,000 people. America was the haven. Many sought to escape the depressed economy and authoritarian political life of Germany. There was likewise a resentment toward ecclesiastical paternalism since the clergy were largely regarded as agents of the state, maintaining strict control over the rites of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial.

Secondly, we should notice that the Evangelicals found the earlier waves of German immigrants to be foreigners religiously. Though there was some contact, neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed people could identify with their historical brothers in Christ.

Thirdly, coming from a state church, the laymen had minimal experience in managing the affairs of a parish. The denomination that could supply a local pastor usually made headway in gaining that parish as a member congregation. For that reason, the

importation of European pastors, or the alternative of training them here, became a paramount concern.

Fourthly, voluntary giving to support a church was a new experience. Their former system of taxation left little need to decide what to give.

Finally, they entered an environment where there was freedom to worship or not to worship. The free-thinking rationalist frequently regarded himself as "emancipated" from the shackles of the church and the poison of Clericalism.

(For the UCC constituency, it is worthy of note that considerable encouragement and financial support came from the Hartford-based American Home Missionary Society of the Congregational churches. Not a minor part of their concern was to counteract the growth of the Roman Catholic movement through a self-formed society familiarly known as L.U.P.O.—"Looking Upward, Pressing Onward." The Hartford Society was instrumental in securing two pastors from the Basel Mission House: Joseph Rieger and George W. Wall. The latter was the organizing pastor of Holy Ghost Church, St. Louis and St. Peter's and St. Mark's Churches in north and south St. Louis, respectively.)

By 1836, Evangelical union congregations had been formed in St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Washington, New Orleans and Cincinnati. The next year Pastor Louis Nollau arrived from the Basel Mission House, with the initial intention of evangelizing the Flathead Indians. Instead, upon arrival, he was instructed to remain in St. Louis County. In 1833 he accepted the call to pastor the newly founded St. John's Church at Gravois Settlement. On September 28, 1840, he sent the following letter to a number of German Evangelical ministers:

Dear Colleague:

For some time a number of German Evangelical brethren who are in charge of United Evangelical congregations have felt in their solitude and isolation the need of fellowship and fraternal cooperation. This feeling has become stronger of late on account of opposition of the English Lutheran synods, and, for those living in the neighborhood of St. Louis, of the ultra-Lutherans.

In order to establish and foster such fellowship, we propose, if God wills, to hold a fraternal gathering on Wednesday, October 14, 1840, in Gravois Settlement. It is not intended at this time that this meeting shall be a gathering of a "synod," but for the time being it shall simply afford an opportunity to become mutually acquainted. Some im-

portant matters will be deliberated upon, and a covenant of fraternal fellowship will be made.

The venerable Reverend Mister Wall of St. Louis joins me in the cordial and fraternal wish that you honor us on that day with your presence. Should this, however, be impossible, we request you to send us in writing, on or before said date, your proposals and wishes concerning a closer alliance of the Evangelical clergy.

With cordial greetings,  
Louis Eduard Nollau<sup>1</sup>

The meeting was attended by five pastors: Hermann Garlichs of Femme Osage, Philip Heyer of St. Charles, George Wall of St. Louis, Karl Daubert of Quincy and John Riess of Millstadt. Among the 24 resolutions made was the adoption of the following doctrinal statement:

"The German Evangelical Church Society of the West, as a part of the Evangelical Church, defines the term Evangelical Church as denoting that branch of the Christian Church which acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, the sole and infallible guide of faith and life, and accepts the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as given in the symbolic books of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, the most important being the Augsburg Confession and Luther's and the Heidelberg Catechisms, in so far as they agree. Where they disagree the Evangelical Church Society of the West adheres strictly to the passages of Holy Scripture bearing on the subject, and avails itself of the liberty of conscience prevailing in the Evangelical Church."<sup>2</sup>

Thus came into being Der Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenverein des Westens, the German Evangelical Church Society of the West, later, in 1877, to become the Evangelical Synod of North America.

Membership henceforth was to consist of ordained clergy, lay delegates and advisory members. Only in emergencies would ordinations take place between conference meetings. A committee was appointed to draft a catechism, clergy were encouraged to

<sup>1</sup>David Dunn, *A History of the Evangelical and Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1961), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Julius H. Horstmann and Herbert H. Wernecke, *Through Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1938), p. 72.

wear the customary vestments used in the "Evangelical mother church," and the prospectus of a Book of Worship was to be prepared for presentation at the next meeting.

Three early actions need enunciation. First, in June, 1848, a detailed plan was developed for a theological seminary to be located midway between Femme Osage and Marthasville, the latter being the name adopted for the seminary. The seminary opened in 1856 with eight students and two professors. In 1883 it moved to St. Louis and became Eden Seminary, which, in 1925 located on its present campus in suburban Webster Groves.

Secondly, in January of 1850 *Der Friedensbote*, the "Messenger of Peace," appeared as the first official organ of communication. On the title page appeared Ephesians 4:3: "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The paper appeared semimonthly at an annual subscription rate of 50 cents. In its first year it made a profit of \$64.90.

Thirdly, we need to mention the Evangelical Catechism. In 1847 the Kirchenverein published its own catechism containing 219 questions and answers (supported by a number of Bible verses). The main parts dealt with the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed, prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In 1870 a Board of Home Missions was founded. In 1871, Elmhurst College succeeded the failing proseminary in Evansville with the primary purpose of educating teachers for the Evangelical parochial schools. Foreign missions to the Indians had been a concern at least since 1884 and in May of 1884, the General Conference assumed the responsibility of the Indian Mission Field with the conviction "God wills it!"

It should not be thought that the Evangelical Synod of the West was the only formal organization of Evangelical pastors and congregations. By 1872 the United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest included 82 congregations in Michigan and northern Illinois. The Evangelical Synod of the East had 36 congregations from Rochester to Buffalo and across to northeastern Ohio. The merger of the three Synods in 1872 resulted in a total of 283 pastors and 337 congregations.

By 1934 the Evangelical Synod counted 250,000 communicant members. Dr. Paul Press would extend the symbolic hand of kinship and merger to Dr. Henry Christman of the Reformed Church in the United States.

Rev. Thomas R. Hamilton

Pastor of the Elon College Community Church, Elon College, N. C.; reared in the tradition of the Evangelical Synod of North America.



**HISTORY OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN  
THE UNITED STATES TO 1934  
AND  
THE EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH TO 1957**

By

The Rev. Frank W. Snider, Sr.

The Reformed Church began in Switzerland in about 1522 with the Rev. Huldreich Zwingli as the moving spirit. Zwingli broke with the Roman Catholic Church, although he was a priest of the church, and led the churches of Zurich in protest against the Roman Church. War took place between the Catholic and Reformed Cantons of that area of Switzerland and Zwingli was killed while he served as Chaplain to the Reformed troops.

John Calvin followed Zwingli as the leader of the Reformed movement in Switzerland, France, Holland, and Germany. The Reformed movement was basically in southern Germany, the area known as the Palatinate. Wars, poverty, and Catholic oppression led the German Reformed and Lutheran people of the Palatinate to seek refuge in the New World. This movement began in the eighteenth century.

The earliest known German Reformed settlements on American soil were at Germantown, N. Y., in 1709, Schoharie, N. Y., in 1712 and Germana, Va., in 1712-1714. Swiss Reformed settled at New Bern, N. C., in 1710-1711.

The first permanent settlements of Germans were made in eastern Pennsylvania, west and northwest of Philadelphia. These settlements began mainly in Montgomery and Bucks Counties in the 1710-20 era. These German Reformed and Lutheran settlers brought with them their German Bibles and the Heidelberg Catechism. Only a couple of pastors came in this early group and they did not remain to become pastors of permanent congregations. Thus it was that the German Reformed people living in the Schuylkill Valley, north of Philadelphia, prevailed on John Phillip Boehm, a schoolmaster, to become their minister. Without benefit of ordination, on October 15, 1725, Boehm administered communion to the congregation at Falkner Swamp to 40 members. This date is considered the beginning date for the German Reformed Church in the United States. Falkner Swamp, near the present Pottstown, Pa., is considered the oldest continuous German Reformed congregation still in existence. In November of 1725 Boehm gave communion to 37 members at Skippack and in December to 24 members at White Marsh. Boehm was eventually ordained by a committee of Dutch Reformed ministers in New York under the authority of the Classis of Amsterdam, North

Holland, in 1729. In his report to the Synods of Holland, Boehm lists eight congregations with 286 communicants, and asked for at least three ministers from Holland to help with the ministry to these people.

The Rev. Michael Schlatter was sent in 1746 by the Synods of Holland to organize the German Reformed people of Pennsylvania. In 1747 he gathered the first COETUS (Synod). There were in attendance 4 ministers and 27 elders representing 12 congregations. Schlatter traveled extensively in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia and organized a number of congregations. By 1752 Schlatter reported to the leaders in Holland that there were 30,000 Reformed people in Pennsylvania with 46 congregations and 6 pastors.

The church continued to grow through the Revolutionary period and many of the German Reformed people were active patriots. During this time the church was still under the supervision of the Synods of Holland. In 1793, however, the Reformed people of the United States began the independent, "Synod of the Reformed (High) German Church in the United States of America."

Franklin College, now Franklin and Marshall College, in Lancaster, Pa., was the first German Reformed school of higher learning. It began in cooperation with the Lutherans, but was eventually purchased by the Reformed people. It was chartered on March 10, 1787. A Seminary was begun on March 11, 1825, in Carlisle, Pa., later moved to York, Pa., and in 1837 to Mercersburg, Pa. It finally located in Lancaster, Pa., in 1871 and is now known as The Lancaster Theological Seminary.

German remained the language of the German Reformed Church well into the nineteenth century. Because English was the official language of the government, the young people in particular began to ask for services of the church to be conducted in English. In the Reformed Church in Philadelphia the language problem became so intense that in 1804 it resulted in the withdrawal of the English party and the organization of another congregation. The problem continued and grew again and in 1817 another English party had grown up in the congregation. This time the English were so strong that the German party withdrew and formed another congregation.

All of the best farming land in eastern Pennsylvania was pretty well settled by 1740 so that new immigrants and second generation residents of Pennsylvania began to spill over into Maryland and Virginia and on down into North Carolina. These settlers traveled to North Carolina by way of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Some of them stopped along the way and a

number of German Reformed congregations were founded in the Valley, some dating back to about 1745. These congregations are located in Rockingham and Augusta Counties in Virginia. The Rev. John Brown was the first resident pastor of the area.

The first settlers in North Carolina settled in four areas: Catawba - Lincoln Counties; Rowan - Cabarrus; Davidson - Forsyth; and Guilford - Alamance. In Alamance the first settlements were around the Stinking Quarter, a creek running through the area. The oldest congregations of the German Reformed faith in North Carolina are: Brick (Clapp's) Church, Pilgrim, (Leonard's) Church, Grace (Lower Stone) Church and Old St. Paul's. All of the congregations date from the 1745-55 era.

In the first years of the German Reformed in North Carolina there were no resident pastors at the churches. Congregations were served by the following; The Rev. Christian Theus, a Swiss from near Columbia, S. C.; the Rev. James Martin, a Swiss from S. C.; the Rev. Richard Dupert (Dubard), who lived in Gaston County, N. C.; and then by the Rev. Samuel Suther. The Rev. Mr. Suther was a Swiss who came to North Carolina in the 1760's and began his ministry.

The Rev. Andrew Lorentz served all of the Reformed Churches in North Carolina at one time or another. He was a Swiss who had settled near Lincolnton and his home still stands near Daniel's Church. During the 1780's, the Rev. Jacob Schneider served the churches in the Davidson County area and organized at least three of the older congregations. During the absence of Reformed ministers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Moravian ministers often preached in the Reformed congregations of Davidson, Forsyth, Guilford, and Alamance Counties.

The Rev. Samuel Weyberg was sent South by the Pennsylvania Synod and served churches in North Carolina for a few years. He then went West and is said to have preached the first Protestant sermon West of the Mississippi (Missouri). The Rev. Jacob Christman, who was a native of Alamance County, studied for the ministry, was ordained by the Pennsylvania Synod, and served as pastor in North Carolina for a few years. In 1801 he organized the first Reformed church in Ohio at Springboro. Another North Carolinian who became a pastor and went to Ohio was the Rev. John Jacob Larose. He left Guilford County in North Carolina in 1804. The churches in North Carolina were under the care of the Pennsylvania Synod from the time of its independence in 1792.

In 1827, it was estimated there were fifteen to sixteen hundred members of the Reformed Church in North Carolina. In 1831 at Brick Church (Guilford County) the North Carolina Classis

of the German Reformed Church was organized representing sixteen congregations with four pastors and four Elders.

Nationally, the "Home Missions Board" was organized in 1826. Foreign Mission endeavors began in conjunction with the "American Board of Foreign Missions." In 1838 the Foreign Missions Board of the Reformed Church was organized separately.

Soon after the formation of the Classis in North Carolina, emphasis was placed on evangelistic outreach. The use of the Heidelberg Catechism was encouraged by the Classis, but it also encouraged "Protracted Meetings." In 1840 the Classis took action — "Resolved that a camp-meeting shall be held at St. Matthew's Church, commencing on Friday previous to the third Sabbath in August next, and that it shall be the duty of all ministerial brethren belonging to Classis to attend camp-meeting."

In 1853 the Classis of North Carolina withdrew from the German Reformed Church and particularly the Eastern Synod. The reason for withdrawal was over the "Mercersburg Theology." This was a liturgical division between high and low church elements. This division continued until 1867 when the Classis re-united with the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church.

At Newton, North Carolina, in 1851 the Classis began its educational work by founding Catawba College. Catawba remained in Newton until 1925 when it was moved to its present location in Salisbury. Nazarth's Children's Home was begun for orphans of the area in 1903 near Rockwell. A number of new congregations were organized at the beginning of the twentieth century by Dr. J. C. Leonard, Dr. J. D. Andrews and others.

Following World War I, the Reformed Church in the United States entered into ecumenical discussions toward merger with several denominations. Discussions were held with the United Brethren, Dutch Reformed, and various Presbyterian groups. On June 26, 1934, the merger of the Reformed Church in the United States and The Evangelical Synod of North America took place in Cleveland, Ohio. The Reformed Church brought to the merger 6 synods, 58 classis, 1,336 ministers, 1,697 congregations, and 345,912 members.

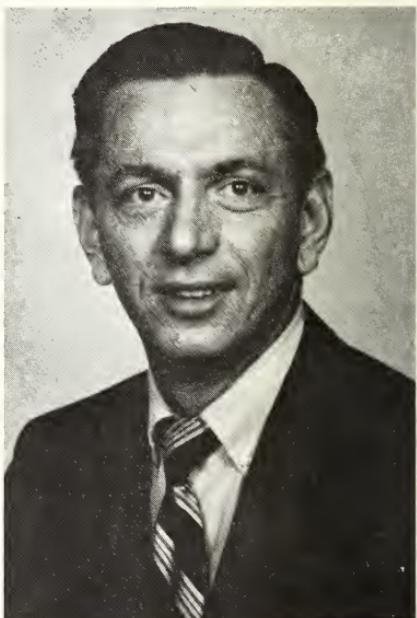
The Southern Synod of The Evangelical and Reformed Church was organized on May 30, 1939 with 62 congregations, 59 ministers, and 11,171 members. Dr. Harry D. Althouse was the first president of the Southern Synod.

The merger which created the Evangelical and Reformed Church was finally complete in 1940. At that time there were 655,366 members contributing an Apportionment of \$853,027 and a Church World Service Offering of \$44,139. In 1959, the last year that the Evangelical and Reformed Church listed separate statistics before merging with other groups to form the United Church of Christ, it reported 810,007 members giving an apportionment of \$4,558,361 and Church World Service offering of \$692,618.

On September 30, 1965, The Southern Synod became an acting association of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ. It brought to the United Church of Christ 77 congregations with 17,000 members.

Rev. Frank W. Snider

Pastor of the Calvary United Church of Christ, Thomasville, N. C.; reared in the tradition of the Reformed Church in the United States.



# **HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES 1931-1957 AND THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST SINCE 1957**

By

Dr. James H. Lightbourne, Jr.

In 1924 a process began which led to the union of the Congregational Christian Churches in 1931. A unity commission was organized which contacted 24 denominations that might have interest in church union. Of these only 11 responded. In the final analysis just three indicated serious interest. Correspondence between these led to a conference held at Toledo, Ohio, on June 17, 1926. Subsequent meetings were held, eventually leading to the union of the Congregational Churches and the Christian Churches.

The National Council of Congregational Churches meeting at Detroit, Michigan, on May 20, 1929, and the General Convention of Christian Churches meeting at Piqua, Ohio, on October 25, 1929, approved the union. The General Council of Congregational Christian Churches was organized on June 27, 1931, at Seattle, Washington.

The National Council of Congregational Churches was much larger than the General Convention of Christian Churches in terms of the number of churches and total membership. However, the influence of the Christian churches and leaders remained strong in the new denomination. In the South the great majority of the churches were of Christian background, particularly in North Carolina and Virginia.

Reference already has been made today to the Cardinal Principles of the Christian Churches. Candidates for the ministry could be certain they would be required to recite these five (sometimes a sixth relating to church union was included) Principles. The influence of the Principles —

1. Jesus Christ is the only head of the church.
2. Christian is a sufficient name for the church.
3. The Holy Bible is a sufficient rule for faith and practice.
4. Christian character is a sufficient test for church membership and fellowship.
5. The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience are rights and privileges which should be accorded to and exercised by all.

6. We look to the union of all Christ's followers.  
— persisted through the life of the Congregational Christian Churches and into the United Church of Christ. The Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ states:

"The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world . . ."

One of the most significant acts of the Congregational Christian Churches was the formation of the Council for Social Action in 1934. Through this new and active agency the vigorous interest of the churches in social issues was institutionalized.

Still another interest of the fellowship of churches was the matter of church union. In the early 1940's, prior to World War II, formal conversations began between representatives of Evangelical and Reformed and Congregational Christian congregations in the St. Louis area on the possibility of church union. The war slowed down the process, but by 1944 a Basis of Union was developed and a procedure was approved leading to further consideration of the possibilities. Before it was in its final form, the Basis of Union was revised at least five times. However, in 1948 the Basis of Union with Interpretations was approved by the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches and by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1949.

From 1950 to 1953 the proposed union was halted by litigation in the courts. A group of Congregational Christian Churches sought to block the union through court action. Their main concern was that they might lose their "congregational" character and rights in the proposed union. Ultimately the courts ruled against the protesting churches and the way for union was cleared.

The Uniting General Synod for the United Church of Christ was held in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1957. Few who attended will ever forget the experience. To symbolize the union the delegates of the two bodies gathered in the lobby of the large convention hotel. They then processed out of the hotel through separate exits to meet again out in the great public square and march side by side to the auditorium where appropriate ceremonies were held. A small band and choir led the procession, leading in the singing of "Onward Christian Soldiers." It must be remarked the marching was better than the singing. The leaders were well on their way through the hymn while those to the rear were still on the first chorus. The citizens of Cleveland undoubtedly had viewed a number of different kinds of parades in the past, but this was the first "church" parade they had ever seen moving through their streets.

The union of these two denominations was of major significance because it marked the first time two church groups of different forms of church government had joined together. The Evangelical and Reformed Church practiced the presbyterian form of church polity. The Congregational Christian Church followed the congregational pattern. While both followed democratic practices, the local congregations of the Congregational Christian Churches were autonomous. The Synods and General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church had jurisdiction over their member congregations.

It was certain that the constitution of the new body would have to reflect both the principle of the freedom of the local congregation and the principle of responsible cooperation for mission and fellowship.

In 1959 the General Synod approved a first draft of the constitution and bylaws for submission to the churches for study. It also adopted The Statement of Faith that now is used throughout the denomination and by many churches of other bodies. The following year the General Synod met again and sent the proposed constitution and bylaws to the Synods of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the congregations of the Christian Churches for their approval. Thirty-two of the Synods voted approval and one voted in the negative. A total of 3,547 churches voted approval against 342 for disapproval.

On Tuesday morning, July 4, 1961, meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the General Synod declared the Constitution and Bylaws in force. Following a prayer of thanksgiving, the General Synod spontaneously sang "The Doxology." Since 1957 Dr. James E. Wagner, formerly president of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and Dr. Fred Hoskins, Minister of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches, had served as co-presidents of the United Church of Christ. With the adoption of the Constitution and Bylaws, the General Synod elected Dr. Ben M. Herbster the first full President of the United Church of Christ.

The organization of the denomination at the national level already had been progressing smoothly. The next step was to bring together the Evangelical and Reformed Synods and the Conferences and Conventions of the Congregational Christian Churches to form the Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

In this immediate area (North Carolina and Virginia) three bodies were directly involved — the Southern Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Convention of the South of Congregational Christian Churches and the Southern Convention of Congregational Christian Churches. These bodies faced the challenge of uniting not only across denominational lines, but also across racial barriers.

The Convention of the South included all of the black congregations of the Congregational Christian Churches from Virginia to Texas. Under the leadership of Dr. J. Taylor Stanley, Superintendent of the Convention since its organization in 1950, it was involved in discussions with groups looking to the formation of four UCC Conferences. Special tribute should be paid to Dr. and Mrs. Stanley for the Christian spirit they evidenced through their long years of ministry in the face of segregation and discrimination.

When the discussions leading to the formation of the Southern Conference began it was under the leadership of Dr. Harvey P. Fesperman, President of the Southern Synod, Dr. William T. Scott, superintendent of the Southern Convention, and Dr. Stanley. Later Dr. Fesperman retired and was succeeded by Dr. Banks Peeler. Dr. Scott resigned to return to the parish ministry and was replaced by Dr. Clyde L. Fields.

The Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ was organized in 1965 and began full operation on January 1, 1966. Headquarters for the new Conference were moved to Burlington, N. C., in the spring of that year and have been maintained there ever since. The Southern Conference is unique in having more black congregations, members and ministers than any other UCC Conference.

The United Church of Christ was the first major denomination to elect a black as its presiding officer. Dr. Hollis Price, Dr. Helen Huntington Smith was chosen to lead the Council for Lay Life and Work. The UCC was also the first major denomination to elect a Black as its presiding officer. Dr. Hollis Price, President of Le Moyne College, Memphis, Tenn., was elected Moderator by the Fifth General Synod and presided over the Sixth General Synod.

In response to the hopes and aspirations of the black people of the United States, the United Church of Christ formed the Commission for Racial Justice and placed majority control of the new agency in minority hands.

The United Church of Christ has continued its historic interest in church union and ecumenical cooperation. It was one of the original group forming the Consultation on Church Union and has continued its participation in its explorations.

Freedom and responsibility are key words for the UCC. While recognizing the autonomy of the local congregation, it also stresses the obligation of the congregation to be a responsible member of the total family of the denomination. The congregations are urged to take seriously the actions of the Conferences

and the General Synod and to support the programs of the national agencies. The young denomination has sought to respond in Christian fashion to the political, social and economic issues of the day while carrying out its normal programs of mission outreach at home and abroad.

As Dr. Robert V. Moss, the second President of the denomination, has said, "The United Church is a church of Christ. We believe that we are called to carry out His mission in our world today. Wherever there are people without the gospel, wherever there are people in need, wherever there is injustice, strife, hatred, and greed—there the United Church of Christ is bound by its Lord to bear witness, to serve, to help, to reconcile, to rebuild. We belong to Christ and we must follow where he leads."



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United Church of Christ.





